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Addendum

BANGLADESH SUPPLEMENTARY REPORT

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Introduction

1. Bangladesh was one of the first countries to sign and ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child. 1/ This expression of the national commitment to provide the full range of protection for childhood in Bangladesh was a heartfelt and serious undertaking. However, it is well appreciated in the world at large that Bangladesh is a country with immense problems. Some of the country's social indicators, for example, the maternal mortality rate, the child malnutrition prevalence rate, and the female illiteracy rate, are among the highest globally. Given the conditions of life for a large number of Bangladesh's families and children, the implementation of the various provisions and articles of the Convention must be viewed within a framework of progressively overcoming a situation of disadvantage and deprival of rights among children which is among the most deeply entrenched and problematic in the world.

2. Certain general characteristics of the country's situation profoundly affect the realities of life for many millions of Bangladeshi children. The country suffers from a coincidence of widespread poverty, overpopulation (118 million population in 1995 with a density of 755 persons per sq. km), frequent natural disasters in the form of cyclones and floods, and severe environmental pressure and degradation. According to a World Bank estimate based on purchasing power parity, Bangladesh has the 36th largest economy in the world; however per capita income is only US$ 240. At present, 48 per cent of the rural population and 44 per cent of the urban population live below the poverty line; 29 per cent and 21 per cent respectively are classified as very poor, with a daily food intake of less than 1,800 calories.

3. At the present time, Bangladesh along with other Asian countries is experiencing the effects of certain socio-economic trends which unfavourably influence conditions for many of the under-18 age group. Foremost among these is the process of rapid economic transition from an almost exclusively agrarian economy to one with growing industrial and service sectors. This has been accompanied by a population shift from countryside to town, in which migrants from the poorer sections of society predominate. The urban population now represents around 20 per cent of the country's population; the slum population represents 25 per cent of urban inhabitants; both proportions are rising rapidly. Population growth in Dhaka, the capital city, is among the highest in the world. Landlessness, increased marginalization of certain groups, and the commercialization of all aspects of life have a negative effect on livelihoods, on family cohesion and on childhood roles. An increasing number of households, estimated at between 10 and 15 per cent, are headed by women on their own, many of whom have been temporarily or permanently abandoned by husbands who neglect their family responsibilities. This erosion of traditional values and support systems leads to family breakdown, early school drop-out, children's entry into the workplace, and to child neglect and abandonment.

4. A relatively high number of children in Bangladesh are living in "especially difficult circumstances". They are not only poorly served by basic health and educational services, but suffer additional forms of deprivation. These include family stress or breakdown associated with poverty, low status especially among girls and ethnic minority groups, floods

and disasters, and disabilities derived from nutritional stunting, iodine deficiency disorder, polio, vitamin A deficiency, and accidents, which are especially common among boys. From very poor households, children of eight years and upwards may forego schooling to undertake tasks which contribute to the economic support of the household. In rural areas, boys join their fathers in the fields. Girls may be sent into domestic service in the towns through the medium of family contacts. In the towns, youngsters can be found working in almost every occupation which their strength permits, from manufacturing jobs in small, barely mechanized, family-run workshops and factories, to collecting fares on public transport, to employment in shops, eating-places and households. These youngsters are regular members of the unregulated informal sector workforce, and the degree to which they can be said to be "economically exploited" varies according to occupation and employer.

5. Laws and statutes to protect children in Bangladesh are numerous. Many are well devised and up-to-date, although a few date back to colonial times. The laws need adjustments in wording or interpretation to bring them further into line with the Convention. Inconsistencies exist between laws designed to cover different aspects of the child's life, and there is no one legal definition of a "child". Indeed, the society as a whole does not regard a boy or girl who has passed puberty as a "child" any longer, whatever the law may say. The legislative process is, therefore, only one route to improved childhood protection. Many laws are inadequately enforced, or are enforced in such a way as to compound damage already inflicted on childhood rather than rehabilitate the child's life concerned. Most children's lives are governed by family custom and religious law rather than by State law. Implementation of the law, in the context of dowry payment or early marriage, for example, needs to be accompanied by changes in values regarding young people's roles and identity, which cannot take place overnight.

6. Bangladesh is a young country, celebrating its twenty-fifth anniversary in December 1996. In its brief history, it has undergone a vigorous but unsettling process of nation-building. Administrative systems are over-centralized and human resources over-stretched. The country's basic services have yet to approach optimal levels of technical and professional capacity. Systems of monitoring and accountability are still inadequate. Political uncertainties have inhibited socio-economic advance and distracted attention from the well-being of families and children - ultimately the most important social value for all humanity, rich and poor. Growing political stability and recent economic gains bolstered by a successful stabilization programme have, however, contributed to a situation in which existing social policy commitment can be progressively transformed into improved realization of women's and children's rights throughout the country, by the united efforts of government and civil society.

I. ENCOURAGING SIGNS: THE CREATION OF AN IMPROVED ENVIRONMENT FOR THE PROMOTION OF CHILD RIGHTS

7. Since the Government of Bangladesh ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child, there has been a renewed sense of policy commitment to the improvement of women's and children's situation. The country's latest

Five-Year Plan (1996-2000) places a high priority on human development. Employment generation, human capital development and poverty alleviation are all features of the current development strategy.

8. In the past, the Ministry of Social Welfare was responsible for overseeing all welfare activities pertaining to children in the country. In order to give more importance to children's development, the Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs was created in 1994 out of the previous Ministry of Women's Affairs. The capability of this Ministry is gradually being enhanced with more investment in training, human resources and information generation. A special cell has been set up for the prevention of violent abuse against women and children.

9. In December 1994, a National Policy for Children was adopted. The principal objectives of this policy are to coordinate and enhance child development activities in the country in harmony with the provisions of the Convention. Its six general objectives are: (i) safe birth and infant survival; (ii) proper educational and psychological development of the young child; (iii) support for the family environment, in which the child should be raised wherever possible; (iv) special assistance for children "in especially difficult circumstances"; (v) ensuring the best interests of the child; (vi) protecting children's legal rights.

10. To monitor activities promoting child well-being, the National Children's Council was formed in August 1995. The Council is chaired by the State Minister for Women and Children's Affairs and includes Ministers and Secretaries from 10 other relevant ministries, Members of Parliament and acknowledged experts on children's issues. The Council is the country's highest policy-making body on child needs and rights and is expected to meet twice a year. It has set in motion a new National Plan of Action to reach certain goals for children by the year 2000.

11. The enhancement of government structures has been matched in the NGO sector. An umbrella NGO body with 70 member organizations, the Bangladesh Shishu Adhikar (Child Rights) Forum (BSAF), came into being in 1990 to coordinate and strengthen NGO activities on behalf of children. Its key activities include raising awareness on children's rights, capacity building of member organizations, research into key issues, and advocacy and lobbying. BSAF's activities tend to focus on the especially disadvantaged and exploited child. The BSAF has an 11-member Executive Board, and a secretariat which coordinates activities and maintains liaison with the Government and national and international bodies. It publishes a number of newsletters and publications on child rights and child labour issues and works closely with the media.

12. Generally, NGOs have entered into a new level of cooperation with government programmes affecting women and children. In the field of education, the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) has been a longstanding collaborator with government, dovetailing its non-formal initiatives with the formal primary system. In the fields of health and nutrition, many NGOs, notably Voluntary Health Services Society (VHSS) and BRAC have been closely involved in the national thrust for the Expanded Programme on Immunization (EPI) and in other programmes. In the areas of

water and sanitation, the NGO Forum for Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation with a network of 560 partner NGOs throughout the country acts as an operational link between the Government, international organizations and donors, local NGOs and communities. In some social sector programmes, specific roles have been mapped out within a partnership framework for government departments and NGOs at national and local level; in other cases, government and NGOs plan and carry out their own programmes, but collaborate closely to avoid overlap, utilize each other's networks and apply consistent principles.

13. The Shishu (Children's) Academy, formed in 1976 by the Government with the purpose of fostering children's cultural and artistic expression, has promoted the Convention through its member branches in all districts of the country. It has adopted a leading role in bringing ideas and practice concerning child rights to the notice of officials and the civil society. Bangladesh has also been successful in attracting international donors to the children's cause through the Government and NGOs, especially in the contexts of education, nutrition, health care, abandoned children and other children "in especially difficult circumstances".

A favourable policy climate for child development

14. The survival and development of children, and the well-being of mothers on whom child well-being depends, has received considerable attention in Bangladesh during the past decade. To this end, an increasing proportion of resources has been devoted to the development of the primary health-care network, the provision of safe water supplies and sanitation, and to disease control programmes specifically geared to the infant and young child. Sectoral efforts have been supplemented by strong social mobilization and public information. Health and educational messages have been disseminated via the full range of television, radio, print, cultural and informal communications channels. A cartoon character, Meena, has been created for use in videos and comic books to promote child health and education, especially for the girl child, and has become very popular. Important achievements in child survival and development are recorded in the next section of this report.

15. Since the World Declaration on Education for All (1990), there has been a major intensification of efforts to provide basic education for all Bangladeshi children. According to the 1991 census, 75 per cent of the female population and 70 per cent of the male population were illiterate, a factor seriously impeding national, community and personal development. To address this situation as a matter of urgency, a separate division with ministerial status was set up in 1992 with full responsibility to deal with matters concerning primary and mass education. The recently elected Government and the Prime Minister have declared their intention to ensure the eradication of illiteracy within 10 years. A National Plan of Action on Education for All has been approved, and goals for the year 2000 have been set, including a literacy target of 62 per cent.

16. The two key strategies are the promotion of primary education and of non-formal education for the unschooled above primary school age. Primary education was made compulsory by act of Parliament in 1990 and introduced

in 1992 in 68 thanas (sub-districts). 2/ Since 1993, it has in principle been extended throughout the country. For all children aged 6 to 10, schooling is free throughout the primary cycle, up to Grade 5; but in order to encourage the presence of girls in school, their education is free until Grade 8. A Conference on Universal Primary Education jointly sponsored by the Government and NGOs was held in Dhaka in 1996 to review the spread and quality of schooling and maintain momentum in this key area.

17. Bangladesh is known worldwide for its ground-breaking non-formal educational activities for the unschooled, pioneered mainly by NGOs but increasingly undertaken also by the Government. Non-formal institutions offer children and youth who did not enrol, or who dropped out of school, an educational second chance. Many aim for the reintroduction of children into the formal school system once they have caught up with their age group.

New areas of policy concern regarding childhood

18. Although in policy terms there is a strong commitment to meeting children's needs, the notion of children's rights is new to the society and unfamiliar to the population at large. Steps have been taken to convey the concept of children's rights and highlight children's roles within society in a positive and well-publicized manner. Since 1992, a National Child Rights Week has been observed with joint government and UNICEF sponsorship and active participation by NGOs. The Week's activities are inaugurated by the Prime Minister and include a children's rally, painting exhibitions by street children, a seminar on children's rights and a presentation by children themselves of a memorandum on their key demands to the Prime Minister or another figure of national stature. The Week has now become an annual event. However, more needs to be done to embed in the minds of politicians, government officials and all classes of society the meaning and significance of the rights of children. Action, described later, is being taken in this regard.

19. In the light of the socio-economic trends already identified which can so easily damage family life and childhood, areas of concern beyond those of survival, health and education have been identified. These trends are particularly noticeable in the urban areas, where the rate of population growth and the pressure of human numbers on the town and city environment is among the highest in the world. The protection of urban (and rural) children from abandonment, neglect, economic exploitation, violence and other forms of abuse, and rehabilitation for those affected, has received greater attention. Bearing in mind the pioneering work of NGOs, the Government has endeavoured to back their efforts and has also embarked on a number of new initiatives.

20. The earliest special area of new concern was the urban child in "especially difficult circumstances": Children working in the urban informal sector and runaways and abandoned children living on the streets. In 1991, a national seminar on street children was convened, and this led to further workshops at national and sub-national level and other actions to familiarize government officers and NGO personnel with the predicament of urban children in distress. Research studies were promoted to collect information about their predicament and new programmes on their behalf have grown out of these

initiatives. The commitment of the Prime Minister to the plight of street children is demonstrated by her authorship of a book on this subject.

21. Other concerns relating to child abuse and neglect have subsequently come into focus, and a similar process is under way. The Women and Child Repression (Special Provision) Act was enacted in 1995 to provide a new legal framework for the prosecution of individuals inflicting gross abuses of rights on women and children. A workshop focusing on juvenile justice and safe custody of young offenders was held in December 1996. A process of research and information-gathering has been under way in a number of child protection contexts, notably child labour and child sexual exploitation, as has been the development of suitable programmes, some of which are enumerated in the final section of this report. Some well-established NGOs, such as the Underprivileged Children's Educational Programme (UCEP) in Dhaka have been providing education and training to working children for many years. Members of the private sector, specifically the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers Exporters Association (BGMEA), have recently become partners in efforts to reduce the child workforce in ways which are beneficial to young workers and do not condemn them to destitution. The Government is fully committed to taking action in these delicate and complicated areas.

22. Given the very real constraints faced by the Government of Bangladesh in delivering quality services in all contexts concerning children and their rights to survival, development and protection, and given that it will take time to erode ingrained attitudes and practices concerning children's upbringing, it is not possible to advance simultaneously on all fronts towards the fulfilment of all children's rights. Therefore, the Government has recognized the need to prioritize the types of programmes to be emphasized, and the priority activities to be undertaken within the various sectors. The policy climate is now more energized towards children suffering from multiple abuses of rights, starting with acute poverty and its interactions with other losses of rights, especially among women and girls. Government officers and civil society are also more conscious of these issues, which are regularly reported in the media.

II. SOME NOTABLE ACHIEVEMENTS IN HEALTH FOR ALL, EDUCATION FOR ALL, AND IN OTHER KEY AREAS

Achievements in child survival and development

23. Since 1988, the under-five mortality rate has dropped from 162 per 1,000 live births to 139 per 1,000 live births. The infant mortality rate stands at 77 per 1,000 live births (57 in urban areas compared to 79 in rural areas), down from 110 per 1,000 in 1988.

24. One of the principal reasons for these reductions in infant and young child deaths has been the success of the Expanded Programme on Immunization (EPI). Immunization coverage rose from 2 per cent in 1985, to more than 70 per cent in 1994. In 1995, 76 per cent of children in the age group 12-23 months were fully immunized, as were 54 per cent of children in the 0-11 month age group. The proportion of pregnant women immunized against tetanus was 59 per cent in 1995; deaths from neo-natal tetanus have decreased from 150,000 to 75,000 per year.

25. An important gain from EPI expansion was the establishment of over 120,000 immunization sites throughout the country, bringing services right into tiny hamlets. More than 90 per cent of Bangladeshi children were able to come into contact with health and family planning workers during the EPI campaign. In many cases, visits to the immunization sites were among the very rare occasions on which mothers left the seclusion of their homes. Women are frequently inhibited from using regular health facilities because of distance, unfamiliarity with their activities and fear of obtrusive medical attention from male personnel. Women's movement outside the home has to be sanctioned by husbands, who traditionally regard their exposure to the wider world as compromising for their safety and reputation.

26. The capacity developed by the EPI programme for interaction between women and children and health-care agents can be utilized for other preventive health and family planning initiatives in what is known as "combined services delivery". Since 1991, the EPI sites have been used for the expansion of vitamin A capsule distribution; this longstanding programme aims to bolster children's capacity to resist disease and to prevent blindness caused by vitamin A deficiency. In November 1995, a vitamin A "sweeping week" was held, as a result of which coverage rose from 74 per cent in 1994 to 83 per cent in 1995. Achievements in vitamin A spread and EPI, especially polio vaccination, have had an important effect in reducing impairments and disabilities suffered by children.

27. There have been marked improvements in health-related environmental indicators due to the combined activities of the Government, NGOs and international organizations. Safe drinking water is now accessible to 96 per cent of all households compared to 38 per cent in 1980; 92 per cent of the population use tubewell water for drinking purposes, although only 58 per cent use it for all their needs. The spread of the sanitary latrine for human waste disposal has also risen dramatically. Between 1990 and 1995, coverage rose from 21 per cent to 45 per cent overall (44 per cent of rural families and 79 per cent or urban families now use a latrine); Bangladesh therefore exceeded the 35 per cent mid-decade target for sanitation coverage. However, the condition of insanitariness in the country still leaves a lot to be desired. The significant improvements in the spread of public health installations has yet to make a major impact on hygiene behaviour and the rate of diarrhoeal disease among young children (see next section).

28. The use of oral rehydration therapy (ORT) to combat dehydration induced by diarrhoeal disease was pioneered in Bangladesh. Today, 93 per cent of the population are aware of this remedy, and over 60 per cent have sufficient confidence and resources to use it. Marginally more boys than girls aged under five years receive treatment with ORT in the case of diarrhoeal infection (66.1 per cent compared to 65.7 per cent). A new initiative has been designed to propagate the merits of ORT to those sections of the population who are still unconvinced, thereby overcoming lingering resistance to its use and further reducing unnecessary loss of child life to diarrhoea.

Achievements in education

29. The most outstanding achievement in education is the rise in primary school enrolment, which has risen from 12 million in 1990 to 16.8 million

in 1995. The gross enrolment rate has risen from 76 per cent in 1991 to 92 per cent in 1995, well above the mid-decade target of 82 per cent. The literacy rate has also risen substantially, from 25 per cent in 1991 to 47 per cent in 1996. These achievements owe much to a strong social mobilization process, which has used mass communications systems of all kinds to create awareness among parents of the value of education. The primary completion rate has also risen, albeit from a low level, from 40 per cent in 1991 to 60 per cent today. More girls seem to attend school regularly than boys, perhaps because parents in rural areas have frequent need of their boys' agricultural labour.

30. In the past few years, gender disparity in primary school enrolment has virtually disappeared, improving from a ratio of 34 girls to 66 boys in 1980, to 50 girls for every 51 boys in 1994. The Government's policy of recruiting women for 60 per cent of teaching positions has paid off. Today, 27 per cent of teachers are female compared to 20 per cent in 1990 - a main reason for the increased enrolment and retention of girls.

31. A number of strategies have been developed to reach children still excluded from the school system. These include involving communities in school and classroom construction using local materials and building techniques. In remote areas, a system of satellite schools dependent on nearby primary schools is being tried so that six-year-olds can attend their first two grades right on their doorsteps.

Improvements in the situation of women

32. Improvements in the situation of women are key to the fulfilment of children's rights, as is well understood in Bangladesh. Although not as striking as in education and health, there are signs of progress. Fertility has dropped, from an average of 7 births per woman in 1970 to 4.6 in 1990. Contraceptive prevalence has risen dramatically from 3 per cent to 44 per cent. Life expectancy among women, which should be longer than that of men if equal family care and health and educational treatment is given to both sexes, has recently begun to rise at a rate faster than that of men; male and female life expectancy are now the same: 57 years. Maternal mortality, while it remains high, has dropped from 6.5 per 1,000 live births in 1986 to 4.6 in 1995. Female literacy has more than doubled in 25 years, but from a low level of 12 per cent to 26 per cent.

33. A number of programmes which provide support to women correspond to the provision in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (arts. 18 and 27) which requires the State to support parents in their child-rearing responsibilities. For women in very poor households, such as landless rural households, slum and squatter urban households, and those run by women on their own, savings and credit schemes such as those operated by the Grameen Bank are an important means of providing women with income, and of raising their status in their own and their husband's eyes. Nearly two million very poor rural women are members of Grameen Bank branches; a high portion have benefited from one or more loans and successfully repaid them. Many other similar schemes have come into being on the heels of the Grameen Bank's success. NGOs paved the way, but the Government is also supporting a number of income-generating, employment creation and skills development activities for impoverished women.

Other activities, such as functional literacy and numeracy, household improvement and day-care for young children, are integrated with these schemes.

III. OUTSTANDING CHALLENGES

Malnutrition (arts 6, 24 and 27)

34. Improvements in per capita GNP do not yet seem to have made much impression on the level of childhood malnutrition, which affects no less than 68 per cent of children, with 11 per cent severely malnourished. In 1990, Bangladesh ranked lowest among 97 developing countries in relation to malnutrition prevalence as compared to GNP. There is also a gender imbalance: most girls receive 20 per cent fewer calories and 12 per cent less protein than boys. Nearly 50 per cent of babies are underweight at birth, which is a reflection of their mothers' own state of under nutrition. Iodine deficiency, anaemia and other micronutrient deficiency diseases which can cause low birth weight, debility and mental impairment need to be combatted more energetically. A renewed effort is needed to understand the many interlocking elements of the malnutrition problem and to put in place truly effective corrective measures.

Disease control (arts. 6 and 24)

35. Safe tubewell water is now used by over 90 per cent of the population for drinking purposes. However, coverage varies, and those people living in areas with a low water table or with chemically contaminated ground water are inadequately served. More effort needs to be made to reduce these disparities in access to safe water. There is also a continuing high incidence of diarrhoeal disease. Around 260,000 children under five years die of diarrhoeal diseases every year. A 1996 survey found that 14.2 per cent of boys and 13.6 per cent of girls in this age group had suffered from diarrhoea within the last 15 days. This is a manifestation of poor maternal and child hygiene and environmental uncleanliness. Bangladesh is low-lying and riverine and water pervades the landscape. Since time immemorial, people have used natural ponds and streams for washing and bathing and old habits die hard. But high population density and defecation in the open environment contaminate this water with faecal matter. Ways must be found to spread awareness about the risks of traditional water usage and sanitary practice, and to persuade people actually to change their behaviour. The control of acute respiratory infections (ARI), responsible for up to one-third of sickness in infants and one-quarter in children under five, also needs more attention. Nutritional improvement will also help to reduce the disease case-load.

Educational challenges (arts. 24, 28 and 29)

36. The National Plan of Action for Education for All has set the following targets for the year 2000: 95 per cent primary school enrolment, 70 per cent primary school completion and 62 per cent adult literacy. Given the high drop-out rate, raising school completion to this level will be particularly challenging. More needs to be done to expand classrooms, improve the physical condition of buildings, install separate sanitary facilities for girls, reduce very high child/teacher ratios, recruit more women teachers, reform the

curriculum and improve teacher performance. The quality of education is more difficult to address than the quantity of schools and teachers. However, unless learning is a relevant and empowering process for children and families, drop-out will continue. The education authorities in Bangladesh recognize the need to reorient teachers so that they see their role as one of facilitating learning rather than force-feeding the child a limited menu of set texts and tasks. Making the school a more child-friendly and parent-friendly place, and turning it into an engine for community growth, is now regarded as both an educational and a developmental priority.

Reduction of economic exploitation and hazardous work (arts. 32 and 36)

37. Estimates of the number of child and young workers in Bangladesh vary, but all surveys agree that the numbers are significant and that they participate in literally hundreds of occupations. In some occupations and enterprises, children are subject to severe exploitation, hazards including accidents and personal violence, psychological stress and exhaustion, even servitude. Urgent action is needed to improve educational opportunities for child workers, remove children and young people from hazardous and unhealthy working environments, and progressively reduce child labour altogether by expanding primary schooling and enabling very poor families to improve their incomes in other ways than by sending their children out to work.

The status of girls, and special abuses suffered by girls (arts. 24, 34-36)

38. Bangladesh is committed to improving the status of the girl child. Deeply ingrained in Bangladeshi attitudes is the idea that girls are less valuable than boys, an idea that needs to be dispelled. Positive action to ensure equal access for girls needs to be built into all health, nutrition and education initiatives. Traditional practices such as payment of dowry and early marriage, although outlawed, still persist and suitable action must be taken against them. Trafficking of girls and young women (and of boys) into prostitution and servitude in other countries needs to be tackled, as does violence and all forms of discriminatory treatment based on gender.

Abandoned and parentless children (arts. 20 and 21)

39. Acute poverty and distress, and the frequency of natural flood and cyclone disasters, lead to a large number of children becoming orphaned or abandoned. Under conditions of family stress, some suffer from neglect and lack of care and choose to run away from home. These constitute a proportion of those begging on the streets. Children born to an unmarried mother are frequently abandoned. Girls who have been trafficked or who have left brutal or violent husbands are rarely accepted back into their natal families. Homes and other facilities for receiving and caring for abandoned babies and outcast children and young people are inadequate and need to be expanded. There are insufficient vagrant homes for the rehabilitation of children found living on the streets, although more are being built.

Family and maternal support (arts. 18, 24 and 27)

40. At 4.6 per 1,000 live births, maternal mortality is still high. This is mainly due to lack of prenatal care to forewarn of complications during

delivery and lack of professional obstetric care if an emergency arises during childbirth. Only 10 per cent of rural births and 44 per cent of urban births take place with a qualified midwife in attendance. The death of a mother in childbirth not only seriously prejudices the survival and health of her newborn - if he or she survives - but also the survival and upbringing of all existing children born to her. Maternal malnutrition is also very common in Bangladesh, leading to low birth weight and vulnerable babies. This problem stems from ignorance as well as economic and cultural factors. The nutritional status, health, education and upbringing of children is also damaged by the acute poverty of their mothers, which needs to be addressed through savings and employment schemes to provide them with extra income. Some women, including teenaged wives, are summarily divorced or discarded by husbands unwilling to fulfil their family obligations. Domestic violence against girl-wives is not uncommon.

The state of the laws and law enforcement (arts. 1-4 and 24)

41. Inconsistencies between the laws relating to children, including definitions of the childhood period, need to be reconciled. Law reform is also needed to bring legislation relating to children and young persons in line with the Convention. The relationship between civil codes and religious and family practice also needs to be explored, with a view to gradually superseding traditional practices such as early marriage and payment of dowry which negatively affect children and young people and their future adult lives.

Children in conflict with the law (arts. 16, 37 and 40)

42. The enforcement of the laws relating to children and youngsters in conflict with the law can be heavy-handed, and there are frequent cases of complaint against violence by the police. Some child victims of crime, or abandoned children who have committed no other offence than vagrancy, are held in custody because there is no other safe institutional setting in which to place them. At the moment, the impact of the law enforcement process on the child may be to further damage his or her childhood rather than lead to rehabilitation. Many children break the law mainly because they are driven to lead lives which deviate from socially acceptable norms and some engage in criminality simply to survive. A continuing process of sensitization of law enforcement agents and judicial personnel is needed about how to handle such children. Conditions of custody and judicial processes need to be improved and the system of juvenile justice expanded. Too many minors are held in jails and police stations alongside adult offenders.

Children's voices (arts. 12, 13 and 17)

43. In the traditional setting, children's voices are usually silent. Parents and other authority figures are regarded as "knowing best" for the child, and the child is expected to give unquestioning obedience. Ideas such as the child's right to be consulted in decisions affecting him/herself have yet to gain currency within Bangladeshi social values. Therefore, a gradual process of attitudinal change needs to be set in motion via educational and other communications channels that can help lead to the fulfilment of this and

other civil rights and freedoms. Children should be empowered to express themselves in ways appropriate to their age and level of maturity, without disempowering parents and others who protect and guide the child's upbringing.

Children with disabilities (art. 23)

44. According to a comprehensive health survey of 1993, the rate of disability for both sexes is 7.13 per 1,000 population, with a considerably higher rate for males than females (8.30 compared to 5.85). This reflects the higher rate of accidents among boys and men. Although there are many preventive health programmes which aim to reduce disability (such as immunization, vitamin A distribution, salt iodization and disease control) there is still an inadequate supply of institutions for the care, education and rehabilitation of impaired and disabled children.

Birth registration (arts. 7 and 8)

45. Most births of children in Bangladesh remain unregistered in spite of statutory requirement. As most rural and urban residents do not enter the formal economic system, there is little incentive to register births. When a record is needed, local officials may certify a person's name, age and nationality. However, to reduce child exploitation, early marriage, trafficking and prostitution, to handle all cases where children come before the courts, and to improve participation and monitoring in health and education schemes, renewed effort is needed to register births and persuade parents of the need to do so.

IV. ONGOING AND NEW PROGRAMMES WHICH ADDRESS PRIORITY CHALLENGES

Health

46. Building on the success of EPI and the increased contact it produced between mothers and front-line health care workers, an emphasis on "one-stop" full maternal and child health care is now being promoted. A policy of recruiting more women health staff is being followed to encourage mothers to use facilities. Attempts are also underway to bring emergency obstetric services within reach of more women and to promote their use to community leaders so that they endorse their use by mothers, who die in childbirth at home rather than abandon their traditional seclusion. A major drive is planned to promote the use of ORT in all cases of childhood diarrhoea. The programme for control of acute respiratory infections by proper case management in all health facilities (currently present in 200 thanas) is also being expanded. Some health care initiatives are being specially targeted at vulnerable and hard-to-reach groups, such as slum populations, hill tribes and women and children in "especially difficult circumstances". In 1995, the Ministry of Health inaugurated a special health and nutrition project for school children in four districts of the country with the purpose of improving the health of students. This prevents their missing school because of illhealth, helps them feel fit and able to do well in class, and in the course of the programme they also learn about good health, eating and hygiene habits.

Child nutrition

47. A number of programmes are under way, directed at especially vulnerable groups. The Bangladesh Integrated Nutrition Programme (BINP) which began in 1995 in 40 thanas, provides food supplements to targeted children, promotes growth monitoring and has a strong information and communication component. BINP aims to reduce severe malnutrition by 40 per cent and moderate malnutrition by 25 per cent among children under two, within five years. A school gardens programme, in which teachers and students jointly manage gardens using the best horticultural methods, also began in 1995 in 240 schools of four districts. Vitamin A capsules are being distributed nationwide to children under six. The country's 265 salt production centres have just completed installation of salt iodization equipment, so it should now be possible to raise the proportion of households (currently only 44 per cent) whose cooking salt has protective properties against iodine deficiency disease. The Bangladesh Breastfeeding Foundation is promoting exclusive breastfeeding and baby-friendly hospitals, focusing on BINP thanas. Other programmes such as the Vulnerable Groups Development Programme target destitute women with a range of interventions, including food rations and nutrition education.

Improving sanitary practices

48. Under the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development, the Department of Public Health Engineering is engaged in a number of programmes to promote the spread of latrines and raise awareness of dirt-related infections. Primary schools are being used to demonstrate good use and maintenance of facilities, and mobilize communities behind creating and maintaining a safe and healthy environment. Recent initiatives in this context have been successful and are now to be expanded. Coverage of facilities in underserved areas, such as hill tracts and the coastal belt, is being accelerated. Social mobilization for hygiene, sanitation and a clean environment has a high priority, especially as part of the NGO Water and Sanitation Forum activities. A Social Mobilization for Sanitation programme operated in 20 thanas between 1993 and 1996 has shown remarkable results in creating demand for water-seal latrines and changing hygiene behaviour.

Education

49. The Primary Education Development Plan 1997-2001 is focused on the following aims: improving access and equity of access by constructing schools in underserved areas; improving teacher training, developing new learning materials and raising the quality of the learning environment; decentralizing school management to thana and community levels and involving parents and community leaders in management; improving monitoring and evaluation of systems. In the non-formal sector, the strengthening of the partnership between the Government and NGOs undertaking the schemes is envisaged. In addition, the Integrated Non-Formal Education Project (the Government and NGOs) is addressing adult literacy in the 15 to 35 age group. The well-known BRAC and GSS non-formal educational programmes continue to gain momentum in collaboration with the Government.

Legal review

50. In June 1995, a national seminar was organized by the Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs on Bangladesh laws on children and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. A subsequent full review of laws relating to childhood has begun, which will recommend measures of synchronization and reform. A national seminar on juvenile justice and safe custody of children in conflict with the law also took place in December 1996. Programmes of sensitization for law enforcement agents handling child victims of crime and children in breach of the law will continue.

Action to reduce gross violations of rights

51. The special cell in the Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs is taking action in the case of reported violence or gross abuse perpetrated against women and children. When such crimes as attempted killing related to non-payment of dowry or rape of domestic servants are reported in the press, the cell takes action on behalf of victims; its work helps create official awareness of the correct procedures to be followed in such cases. A new programme under the Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs with assistance from ILO and other donors will shortly begin to address the full range of issues surrounding child trafficking. In the first instance, a national survey will be conducted building on existing small-scale NGO studies. On the basis of this survey, a plan of action with various components will be developed to address all aspects of the problem. These will include guidelines for border police on apprehension of traffickers, sensitization of communities to the malevolent activities of traffickers in especially vulnerable areas, and a programme for the rehabilitation of trafficking victims.

Action to remove child workers from the export garments industry

52. Since an agreement was signed between the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers Exporters Association (BGMEA), UNICEF, ILO and the Government, over 9,000 children have been released from their jobs in the garment industry and entered in non-formal education institutes specially set up by experienced NGOs, with scholarships to compensate for loss of earnings.

Support for women

53. A range of savings schemes, credit programmes and other income generation programmes are being targeted at destitute women. Many of these adapt or follow the blueprint developed by the Grameen Bank, which has been responsible for handling millions of small loans to poor and landless women over the course of the past 15 years. Equity of access to services for women and girls is an underlying principle of programmes in all sectors. Social mobilization, orientation of community leaders and the promotion of participatory community development mechanisms which help to increase women's status in their own and their menfolk's eyes are regarded as critical strategies. However, age-old taboos and customs which confine women and lead to discrimination against them will take time to erode.

Familiarization with child rights

54. An experiential training module on child rights has been developed by the Department of Women Affairs with the assistance of UNICEF and Rädda Barnen. This module has been used for sensitizing government officials and NGOs. Two national-level training programmes and programmes at the sub-national levels, including districts, thanas and unions, have been conducted in 1996. A programme for training of trainers for government and NGO participants has also been conducted in order to scale up these programmes for the future. Recently, a programme of training has been undertaken under the auspices of the Shishu Academy to spread awareness of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its implications for children and families. Training of district officers has taken place, and the Convention itself is set to become better known and be absorbed into local administrative understanding in such a way as to become a basis for initiatives at the local level. The Shishu Academy has also produced copies of the Convention for widespread distribution, and the Ministry of Woman and Children's Affairs is producing a very simplified text for use with the barely literate population. Journalists and representatives of the media in cities and towns throughout the country are attending orientation sessions on child rights. This has led to more coverage in the press of issues relating to the violation of child rights.

Raising children's voices

55. The voices of Bangladeshi children need to be heard so as to enable children and youth to enjoy a fuller role in society and in national development. Some programmes, notably the school sanitation programme, have shown that school children can be effective change-agents in exhorting their parents to change household water use and hygiene practices. Initiatives undertaken by the Shishu Academy, the BSAF and others which enable children and young people to express their views and develop their artistic skills can be used to demonstrate to society that they have much to say which is useful and significant regarding the future of Bangladesh - which they, in their turn, will come to lead one day.

Notes

1/ It should be noted the Bangladesh has recently decided to view the childhood period as up to 14 years for the purposes of legislative consistency. However, the Convention on the Rights of the Child states that 18 years is the outer limit of childhood. Therefore, when this report uses the term "children and young people" it includes those up to 18 years.

2/ For administrative and political purposes, Bangladesh is divided into 6 divisions, 64 districts, 460 thanas and 4,451 unions.